

Interview with former HM2 H. Paul Churchill assigned to Delta Medical Company, 3rd Medical Battalion in Vietnam. Interviewed by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Navy Medical Department, 4 January 2006.

How did you get to Delta Med?

Actually I started out with Lima 3/3 in April of '66 and was with them for about 4 or 5 months. They were going back to Okinawa for resupply and to get more replacements because of the casualties they'd suffered. At that time, I told the 1st sergeant that they should probably transfer me because I didn't want to leave and then come back. I figured that one time in Vietnam was going to be enough so they should leave me there while I was there.

I was transferred to 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines and wound up near Khe Sanh, which was where Dave got mauled by the tiger. I was with them until December. Just about a week before Christmas, I was rotated out of the field. They said, "Doc. Pack your gear, you're leaving. You're going to D-Med." I had been 9 months in the field with 3/3 and 1/3 before that.

What do you remember about that night?

I was on duty at D-Med. Every time there was a medevac, everybody came out. That night, we heard that a medevac helicopter was coming in so we got up and ran down to the pad. Dave was on that helicopter and when it landed, we grabbed a stretcher and took him in.

Truthfully, I don't remember the other wounds; I remember the arm. He was on the stretcher and his arm was beside him. It was almost as though a surgeon had removed his biceps. The humerus was lying there perfectly clean and just white as snow. It wasn't even bleeding. Doc [Dan] Fuss did a great job out there in the field. It was unbelievable.

We had to put saline on it to hydrate it because it was already drying and the surface was beginning to scab over. We then wrapped it and got him ready to move on to the next stop which was the hospital ship. COL [John] Ripley, the company commander has a report on this and it's pretty detailed.

Dave mentioned the saline and wasn't happy. He didn't have any feeling in that arm when he was out there in the field. There was no pain at all because the nerve had been severed. But, he said, when the saline touched it, he almost hit the ceiling.

I'm sure the saline brought some of the feeling back.

After you applied the saline, what else could you do for him?

We basically cleaned and wrapped it. We routinely used Furacin. There was also a Furadantin impregnated gauze I used on burn victims in the field. I'm not sure that's what we used but we covered the wound with something to protect and keep it hydrated until we could medevac him to where they could do some real surgery.

I understand there were other tiger incidents.

A little north of there we had an incident with a tiger before then. In fact, we had a couple of incidents. One time I was on a patrol and we were probably 8 or 10 clicks north of the base camp. There were eight or nine of us. I was in the patrol and walking in a line with a Montagnard PF [Popular Forces] behind me who was carrying a grease gun [.45 submachine gun]. All of a

sudden, he opened up and nobody saw what he was shooting at. We motioned to him to ask what he was shooting at. He took his hand and made like a big mouth closing and growled. He then pointed at my pants. I looked down and there was blood on my pants leg. Apparently, the tiger had been close enough that when he shot it, the blood spattered on my pants. I never even saw the thing. We were in elephant grass about 9 feet tall. But somehow he saw the tiger and shot it. Even though it left a blood trail, we never saw the tiger. The PF wanted to go after the tiger but we all thought it was better not to especially since he had fired that grease gun and gave away our position. So we decided to get out of there. About 4 months after that, Dave was bitten. You got to where you were watching behind you as much as front of you when you were on patrol. Tigers would sometimes follow or stalk a patrol.

I guess that is something you never forget.

No. It sure is not. I remember that incident like it happened just last night.